

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS  
HOUSTON DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,	§	
Plaintiff,	§	
v.	§	CIVIL ACTION NO. 4:20-cv-03902
	§	
\$9,516.96 SEIZED FROM Connexus	§	
Credit Union Account 9030,	§	
Defendant in Rem.	§	

**VERIFIED COMPLAINT FOR FORFEITURE IN REM**

The United States of America files this action for forfeiture in rem and alleges upon information and belief:

**NATURE OF ACTION**

1. This is a civil action in rem brought by the United States to forfeit and condemn to the use and benefit of the United States \$9,516.96 in U.S. Currency seized from Connexus Credit Union Account 9030 (hereinafter the Defendant Property”) which constitute or are derived from proceeds traceable to wire fraud.

**JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

2. This Court has subject-matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1345 and over an action for forfeiture under 28 U.S.C. § 1355(a).
3. This Court has in rem jurisdiction over the Defendant Properties pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1355(b)(1)(A), because acts and omissions giving rise to the forfeiture occurred in the Southern District of Texas.
4. Venue lies in the Southern District of Texas pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1355(b)(1)(A), 1391(b)(2), and 1395(a) in that the acts and omissions giving rise to the forfeiture occurred in this district and the victim resides in Houston, Texas.

DEFENDANT PROPERTIES SUBJECT TO FORFEITURE

5. Defendants Properties consist of the following:
  - (a) Defendant Property \$9,516.96 in U.S. Currency seized from Connexus Credit Union Account 9030 on June 12, 2020, and held in the name of Ayodeji Barber.

STATUTORY BASIS FOR FORFEITURE

6. This civil action in rem is brought to enforce the provisions of 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C), which provides for the forfeiture of any property, real or personal, which constitutes or is derived from proceeds traceable to any offense constituting “specified unlawful activity” (as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 1956(c)(7)), or a conspiracy to commit such offense. Title 18 U.S.C. § 1343 (wire fraud) is “specified unlawful activity” pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1956(c)(7). A conspiracy to commit wire fraud is a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349.
7. With regard to the civil forfeiture of fungible property, Title 18 U.S.C. § 984(a)(1) and (2) provides that funds in an account in a financial institution that are found in the same account as the property involved in the offense that is the basis for the forfeiture shall be subject to forfeiture so long as the forfeiture action is commenced within one year from the date of the offense.

FACTUAL BASIS

8. A romance scam is a common online fraud scheme. The perpetrator of the fraud (“fraudster”) adopts a fake online identity and uses electronic messages, sent via email or social media services, to gain a victim’s affection and trust. The fraudster then uses the illusion of a romantic or close relationship to manipulate and/or steal from the victim. The victim usually has never met fraudster in person.

Victimization of L.B.

9. An elderly female with the initials L.B. lives in Houston, Texas, which is within the Southern District of Texas. In the Summer of 2018, L.B. met an individual who goes by the name of Chris Hill, on dating website Zoosk.com. Hill purported to live in Spring, TX, but claimed to be working on an oil platform off of the coast of Dubai. L.B. never met Hill in person. Over the course of their relationship, L.B. provided Hill with a large amount of funds to pay for various, taxes, fees, and other business expenses he requested. L.B. stated that she was instructed to wire most of the funds to China and Hong Kong. However, L.B. stated that in January of 2020, she drafted a \$30,000.00 check payable to I.A. L.B. stated a short time later, I.A. contacted her inquiring about the check she received. L.B. stated that they discussed their situations, and concluded they were both being scammed, most likely by the same person. L.B. stated that they discovered, through on-line research, that photos sent to both of them from their boyfriends were identical, and were photos captured from the internet of a public figure in Mobile, AL.
10. In January 2020, the \$30,000.00 check from L.B. was deposited into I.A.'s InTouch Bank account. I.A. lost other funds, due to the same scam, prior to the \$30,000.00 deposit. I.A. stated that she was instructed by David Bullock (aka Chris Hill) to wire \$30,000.00 in January 2020 to an Iberia Bank account in the name of Klam Properties, based in Miami Springs, FL.
11. Following the \$30,000.00 wire transfer into Iberia Bank, there was a \$27,000.00 wire transfer on January 30, 2020 into Connexus Credit Union, account 9030, in the name of Ayodeji Barber (It should be noted that information in the wire transfer indicated the funds were designated for "roof and plumbing repairs"). Additionally, on January 27, 2020 there was a \$26,728.00 wire from Space Coast Credit Union, in the name of Klam Properties, into the

account and on January 31, 2020 there was a \$13,500.00 wire from Georgia's Own Credit Union in the name of QG Auto LLC, into the account. On January 31, 2020, following the deposits, \$61,698.00 was wired from the Connexus CU account to a Bank of America account 4151 with information indicating it was for a 2017 Lexus. Barber filed a claim for Defendant Property in the administrative proceeding, saying that he believed the funds were to be used to purchase and ship a car for a friend who lives in Nigeria.

#### Connection to Defendant Property

12. Funds from L.B. pursuant to the romance scam were deposited into and/or transferred into bank accounts from which **Defendant Property** was seized: The defendants and/or their co-conspirators stole money from Elderly Romance Scam Victim L.B. on or about January 14, 2020, when \$30,000.00 in the form of a personal check from L.B. was deposited into an InTouch CU account in the name of I.A. On January 28, 2020, \$30,000.00 was wire transferred from I.A.'s InTouch CU account to Iberia Bank, in the name of Klam Properties LLC. On January 30, 2020, \$27,000.00 was wire transferred from Klam Properties LLC Iberia Bank account to Connexus CU, account number 9030, in the name of Ayodeji Barber.

#### CONCLUSION

13. Based on the information set forth above, as a result of misrepresentations made by "Chris Hill" pursuant to the romance scam designed to defraud the victim, L.B. sent the fraudster \$30,000.00. In January 2020, a portion of these funds, \$27,000.00, were deposited into, received into, and/or transferred into Connexus Credit Union Account 9030.
14. Consistent with the pattern of activities in online fraud scheme, within days of the victim's funds being received into the fraudsters' accounts, the fraudsters converted the funds to a vehicle, then shipped the vehicle to Nigeria.

CLAIM FOR RELIEF

15. Under the totality of the circumstances, the Defendant Property is property which constitutes or is derived from proceeds traceable to specified unlawful activity, defined in 18 U.S.C. § 1956(c)(7), namely wire fraud (§ 1343) and conspiracy to commit wire fraud (§ 1349).
16. As a result of the foregoing, the Defendant Properties are subject to forfeiture under 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C) directly or through application of § 984(a).

NOTICE TO ANY POTENTIAL CLAIMANTS

YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED that if you assert an interest in any of the Defendant Properties which are subject to forfeiture and want to contest the forfeiture, you must file a verified claim which fulfills the requirements set forth in Rule G of the Supplemental Rules for Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions.

A verified claim must be filed no later than thirty-five (35) days from the date this Complaint has been sent to you in accordance with Rule G(4)(b); or, if this Complaint was not sent to you, no later than 60 days after the first day of publication of notice on an official internet government forfeiture site, in accordance with Rule G(5)(a)(ii)(B).

An answer or motion under Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure must be filed no later than twenty-one (21) days after filing the claim. The claim and answer must be filed with the United States District Clerk for the Southern District of Texas at United States Courthouse, 515 Rusk Avenue, Houston, Texas 77002, and a copy must be served upon the undersigned Assistant United States Attorney at United States Attorney's Office, 1000 Louisiana, Suite 2300, Houston, Texas 77002.

The United States will serve notice, along with a copy of the Complaint, on the property owners and on any other persons who reasonably appear to be potential claimants.

REQUESTED RELIEF

Wherefore, the United States of America requests that a judgment of forfeiture be entered against the Defendant Property and in favor of the United States of America in addition to such costs and other relief to which the United States may be entitled.

Respectfully submitted,

RYAN K. PATRICK  
United States Attorney

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Jon Muschenheim  
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Verification

I, Jason Bollen, a Senior Special Agent with the United States Secret Service, declare under the penalty of perjury, as provided by 28 U.S.C. § 1746, that I have read the foregoing Verified Complaint for Civil Forfeiture In Rem and Notice to Potential Claimants, and that the facts stated in paragraphs 9 through 12 of the Complaint are based upon my personal knowledge, upon information obtained from other law enforcement personnel, or upon information I obtained in the course of my investigation. Those facts are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Executed on the **17th** day of November 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Bollen", is written over a horizontal line.

Jason Bollen

Senior Special Agent  
United States Secret Service